

R.A.C.E. JOURNAL

SEPTEMBER, 1987

REDDING ATARI COMPUTER ENTHUSIASTS

R.A.C.E. 8-BIT

Roundtable Pizza

Mt. Shasta Mall

1st Saturday of each

Month 1pm

MIKE DENNIS, 547-3998



R.A.C.E. ST SIG

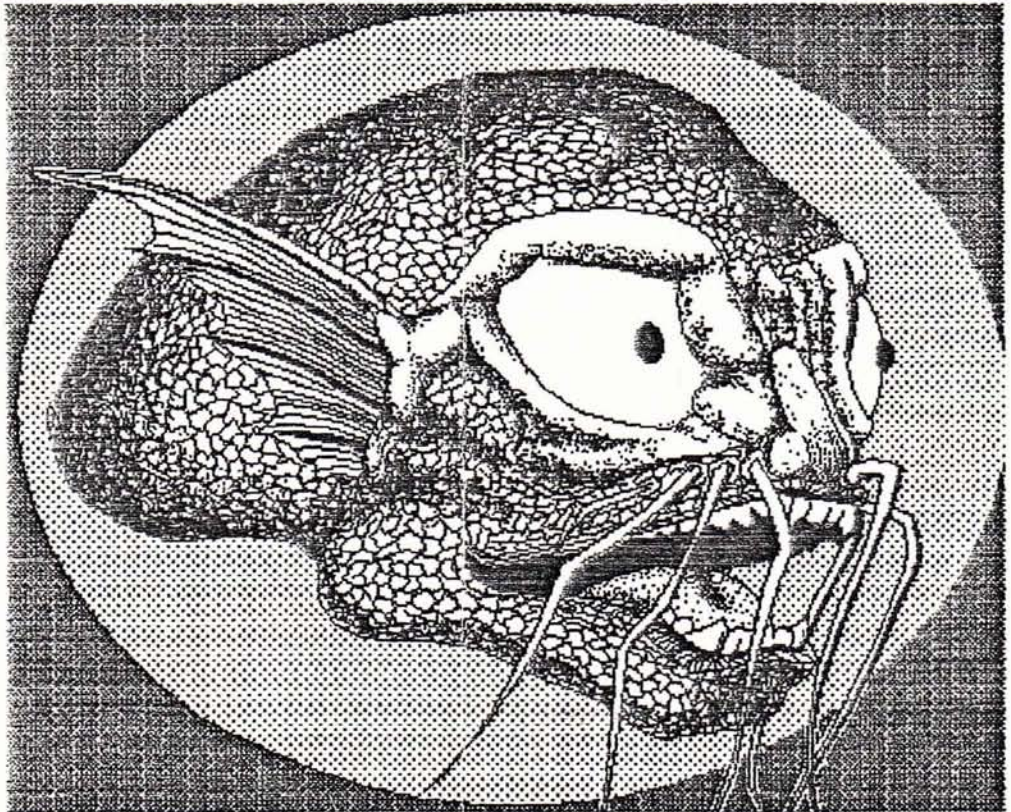
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RUMORS, FACT OR FICTION?

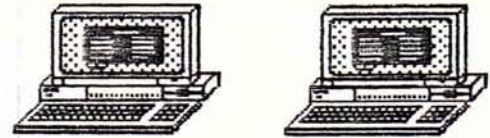
by Kent Irwin Taken from STATUS newsletter Edited by M.K.F.

Rumors abound currently about exactly what products will be released and when from Atari. The purpose of this article is to try to make some predictions (always wrong of course) about what Atari is doing. Take my comments with a grain of salt and some understanding as I have very little idea what makes Atari tick these days. The comments I will make are based on my reading numerous magazines, Atari user group newsletters and word of mouth from Atari representatives.

Currently I have no definite information about shipment of new hardware from Atari except for the new 520STFM (1040 style) which premiered in May. Strangely there is a rumor that this new style 520ST would only be a limited edition, with only a few thousand eventually being made available. The original style 520ST would remain. It looks like though the "limited edition" 520ST is here to stay.

With this noted exception, all other announced products are in vaporware limbo. This includes the aforementioned products originally scheduled for 4th quarter 1986 release. Several dealers have apparently gotten the

run around from the Atari sales department about the release date of these items. Either no-one except those high up know, or there are unplanned problems that have postponed the originally planned release dates.



According to Neil Harris, the new PC failed its initial FCC type approval submission necessitating the addition of more RF shielding and re-submission for FCC type approval. Reliable sources (more reliable than Neil, but that's another story...) now say it "might" ship by late August (of course this is September and still no PC.) There is some evidence that only the version of the PC bundled with the new monochrome monitor will offer EGA video output. Because of its low profile construction the PC will not allow the addition of any internal drives or expansion boards. All add-on drives or expansions will have to be added externally with their own power sources.

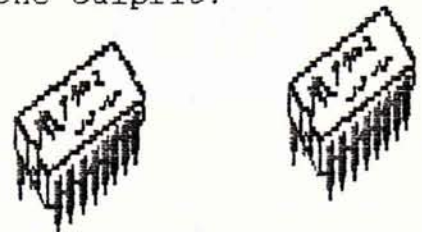
At the moment, there is no valid excuse being offered by Atari for the

delay in shipping the Mega ST's and the laser printer. What's more, Neil Harris now says that, "...it looks like the Mega I has been dropped from the lineup." If true, that will leave only the two and four meg versions of the machines with the present 1040ST remaining as the only one meg ST. Note the fact that I said, "if true." There are some theories floating around about the possible reasoning behind this, but more on this later. Again falling back on normally reliable sources, it's reported that Atari is having problems with the laser printer and does not want to bring the Mega's to market without it because of their stated intent to impact the desktop publishing market with the package. This would seem to make sense when viewed with the fact that third party reports from CES stated that the laser printer shown there by Atari was using a known unreliable Canon engine. They could be trying to iron out problems with the Canon unit or they could be searching for another supplier - something that they do with other product components quite frequently. But, who knows? These are still just rumors, reliable sources or not.

Atari has set pricing for the Mega machines as follows: Mega ST2 Monochrome will be \$1699 list price,

color will be \$1899 list. The Mega ST4 list for \$2399 with Monochrome and \$2599 for color. With this pricing set they should reach U.S. shelves by no later than October 1st, but of course you have heard that before.

And now for strike three - those products scheduled for release by the end of 1986. Although there has been more than one magazine review of the XEP80 Column video adaptor for the 8-bit Atari machines that stated, among other things, that, "...it should be on your dealer's shelf by the time you read this...", I've yet to see one on my shelves nor do I think any have sneaked in while I wasn't looking. Manufacturing delays are said to be to blame. The September issue of Antic claims late delivery of "key microchips" is the culprit.



Antic professes the same excuse for the 1200 baud modem while informed sources (starting to sound like Watergate, ain't it!?) say that Atari was forced to negotiate for a new manufacturer after their deal fell through with the first, whoever that was.

There have also been nasty rumors floating around that the modem would not be Hayes compatible either. For those of you not familiar with the Hayes standard, it's kind of like the Epson graphics standard among printers. It's important in the fact that most decent tele-communications software supports this standard. If a modem is not Hayes compatible then only software specifically written for that particular modem can be used with it, thereby limiting your choices for telecommunications software. Get the picture?



Well, there's a happy ending to this rumor. According to Keith Ledbetter, the author of the ever-popular 1030 and 850 Express! software for 8-bit Atari's, the new modem will not be Hayes compatible only when connected directly to the 8-bit serial chain in the same way as a 1030 or XM301 modem. When connected to an Atari 850 or ICD P:R Connection or an Atari ST the modem will emulate the Hayes Standard after all.

Since the Hayes standard and software that supports it are designed to operate through a standard RS232C communication line, it becomes very difficult to make the modem emulate a Hayes when connected via an Atari 8-bit machine's "non-standard" serial port. Hence the two modes of operation. And how does Keith Ledbetter know about it? He's been contracted by Atari to write a new version of Express! for the modem, that's how!



But wait - there's even more to come! Been wondering where all the 1050 disk drives went? Well, it turns out there will be a new 8-bit 5.25" disk drive after all. It will replace the 1050. The only problem is that the new drive isn't ready and Atari is all but out of the 1050's. It seems that all the 1050's that have been shipping to dealers for the past couple of years were all manufactured long ago. Atari has just been selling them off with none in production

to replace dwindling stocks. With sales of 1050 disk drives outstripping Atari's projections, they've been caught short. Not wanting to gear up for new production of the same old drive they decided to produce the new one, but not quickly enough to pick up the slack as the remaining 1050's are sold. Consequently, so as not to completely run out of 8-bit drives (gee wouldn't that look bad?!), they've decided to make you pay dearly for one if you want it bad enough. The dealer price for 1050's has been raised to close to what many stores were retailing them for previously.



Worse still, a dealer must now purchase one 130XE computer for each 1050 disk drive that he wants! Now the 130XE is a fine machine, but the reality of the situation is that no dealer is going to sell as many 130XE'S as he does 1050 disk drives. Probably 50-60% of disk drive sales are made to customers buying them as second or even third drives for their one computer. Not too many dealers, myself included, want to wind up

with a room full of 130XE's collecting dust just for the priveledge of selling some 1050's. Business is business, after all. But at any rate, the new drives will be double sided, double density units with a new DOS to support them. The new DOS will also support the older drives, reportedly insuring no compatibility problems. These too will be shipping by late summer, so the lady at Atari says. You do believe her, don't you?

As you are reading this it is being reported that some Mega ST's have started to appear in Europe. Simon Poole, a Swiss ST'er well known to American ST owners as the author of the public domain terminal program, Uniterm, reports that these machines have the promised new TOS ROM's on board but not the blitter graphics coprocessor. Furthermore, he says that the new ROM's are causing some software compatibility problems. Uniterm, for instance, will not run on a Mega ST. This and the absence of the blitter chip holds no good for us and could account for some of the delay in shipping Mega ST's for the U.S. market. Is Atari having trouble with the blitter after all? If so it's no surprise that they aren't for sale in this country as the blitter was very definitely promised as an integral part of the new

machines, not to mention being an adaptable retro-fit to existing 520 and 1040ST's.

Remember the theory I mentioned earlier in relation to Neil Harris's announcement that the Mega I had been dropped from the new line, leaving the present 1040ST as the only one meg machine? Well, the theory goes something like this - and remember, it's only a theory, it could well be that the Mega I will be available after all and that Atari is saying what they're saying in order to get people to buy up existing 1040's. So why would they fib to us like that? Simple. As soon as the Mega line was announced sales of 1040ST's started to decline drastically. Naturally, a lot of folks didn't want to buy the "old" machine when the new one would be shortly introduced. Of course that hurts Atari as well as their dealers because a decline in sales means a decline in revenue.



In business, one doesn't stay in business if one isn't selling things. In

order to boost sales of the 1040's back up it could well be that they decided to say that the Mega I had been dropped with only the more expensive Mega II and IV eventually coming out. This is by no means a new strategy on behalf of a manufacturer.



Other computer vendors have done it before and Atari itself did it in January when they told dealers that the re-styled 520ST would only be a limited edition. We now certainly know that was not true. Any number of excuses could be used if and when they ever do decide to market the Mega I after all. I can hear it now, "...there was such tremendous demand from consumers, that we changed our minds and decided to bring out the Mega I after all!"

Remember now, this is all just the product of someones fertile imagination as to what Atari is doing. But if it turns out to be true in a few months, remember where you hear it! Personally I feel that Atari may want to package the

multiple Meg series machines in a separate category than the other ST's. To come out with the same memory storage in a different design would cause problems for sales of 1040's in stock. I would hope that they are not fibbing to us, just changing their minds and having those machines with 1 megabyte of memory or less selling in 520 or 1040 styles and those with multiple megabytes in the Meg configuration. We will just have to see what happens.



How do we end this story of rumor, fact or fiction? First we have to bear in mind that Atari is a profit making corporation that must sell products at a profit in order to survive and grow. So why, with that said, don't they hurry up and ship this stuff so people can buy it and they can make money? Well there's still a piece of the puzzle missing here that we owners of Atari computers often overlook. Atari video games. Yes, that's right, video games. It is reported that Atari is making tremendous profits from their dedicated

game machines and being a for profit corporation their primary manufacturing emphasis is going to be on what nets them the most income. With only one manufacturing site in Taiwan it's not difficult to imagine the potential production bottlenecks that could be encountered with trying to bring several new products to market while still cranking out existing money makers.



When a bottleneck occurs, you clear it out and concentrate on what you know will sell and make money and worry about the rest later. Profit is and always shall be the very bottom-most of bottom lines. The light at the end of the tunnel is provided by the fact that the "new" Atari Corporation is staging a comeback and starting to reap some handsome profits under the guidance of the Tramiel dynasty. With this new

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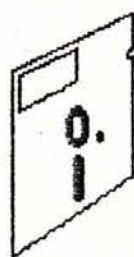
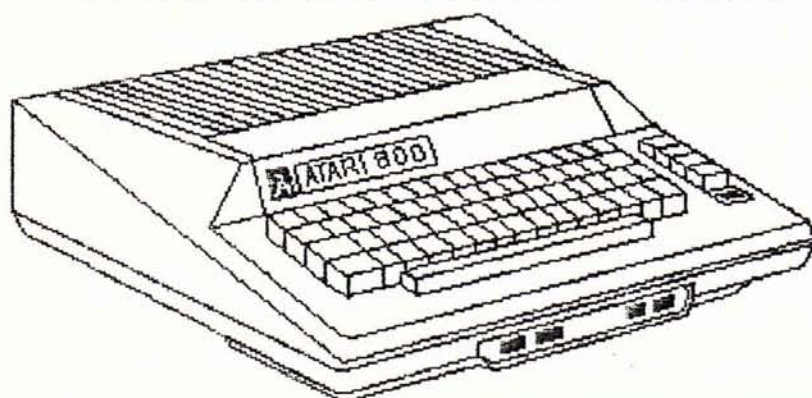
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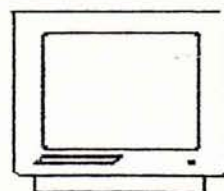
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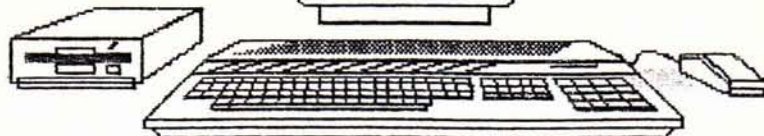
HARD DISK DEVELOPMENT

Cottonwood Computers is currently working on several hardware projects which may be of extreme interest to ST owners. We are working on a 20 megabyte disk which we would like to sell and market for around \$550. We will keep you posted on development and pricing. We also may develop a 10 megabyte drive with a 5 1/4" drive in the same case. If you are interested in our endeavors call us!

SF314 Double
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3.5 " disks
Sony \$17.95
Generic \$12.95
for 10



Are The 8-bits In Trouble?

BY BOB WOOLLEY

WE LOVES THEM, WE LOVES THEM NOT

The subject of this article is the - loss of support for the 8-bits/death of the old 8-bits/lack of 8-bit software/... I just read a piece in the Pokey Press that chronicled the author's transition from an 800 to an ST. Although the writer did not intend to completely retire the trusty old 8-bit, he was drawn to abandon his 800 by the sheer power and utility of the ST programs. He writes: "With a software line-up like I had available to me on the ST, what possible reason could I have to boot up my 800?" and "When it came to word-processing, Wordwriter ST, ... beat the living hell out of anything available for the 8-bit..." with "...Flash was clearly superior to anything I'd used on the 8-bit (including my old family servant, Express...)". Ken White, the author, continues his column with the observation that the door is slowly closing on the 8-bits as it had on the relics of the early years of computing: "Of course, the 8-bit Atari line will, one day, be a fond memory to everyone. Just like the Exidy Sorcerer and the Altos ..." and "...a machine with 4K of memory and a tape drive was one day the 'cutting edge' of personal computing, that day was a lotta yesterdays ago."

That's funny. I have an old 8-bit and an ST set up side-by-side in my computer room. I also have Flash for my ST and Express for my 800XL. But, the ST is the one collecting dust in my house. When it comes to word processing, 80 columns or 800 columns (I only print 60 on an 8 1/2 inch form, anyway), out comes the old AtariWriter cartridge. Flash is probably a great program, but the data still comes over the phone line at 1200 baud and I still only type with two fingers, so I use Express on my "relic". Why? Am I just stubborn, or is there a valid reason why my 8-bit will always be the machine of choice, other than the cost of purchasing all new software and learning all new programs? Certainly, I use the ST, but only for things that can't be done well on the 8-bits - like Publishing Partner and Easy Draw. Everything else seems to default to the XL.

The first indication of this trend was the response that I got when I inquired about a disk editor and useful utilities for my new ST. I am sure that they exist, probably in Public Domain, but not commercially. The computer store

where I bought my ST had a whole wall of ST software, but little of what I sought. Such a poor selection indicates very little user interest in buying software dedicated to these primary functions. Likewise, a memory map does not seem to be a favorite purchase for ST owners, either. In fact, the software offerings for the ST seem to target only the user or the advanced programmer. Little seems to interest those that would like to program their own systems. At this point, I would like to speculate about the flaw in Ken White's (and 800,000 others') reasoning - the ST and AMIGA style machines are not an advancement in the field of personal computing. They are much too complex to be grasped by the casual user to be effective for the personal computer owner.

Computers came into existence about 40 years ago. Programmable calculators capable of logical comparisons, in themselves, could not accomplish as much as your average can opener without the stored program that someone had to create. Once the program is operating then the system became a can opener, or whatever. This is where I would like to make the division between a computer and a Multi-Dimensional Electronic Device. A computer can be programmed by the average user - an MDED cannot. A good example of an MDED is the 2600 game system. PONG was an electronic device - fixed forever at the time of manufacture. The 2600 Atari was an MDED - taking the configuration of whatever cartridge was inserted. This was a VAST improvement over fixed program devices, but it was NOT a computer. You had no way to do your own thing on it. A similar circumstance existed in the world of computers at that time. You could have your own terminal that hooked up to the mainframe and play ZORK on your "computer", but unless you were a wizard, you had no chance to program the beast. Enter the personal computer... (did you know that the Atari 800 was named the Atari 800 Personal Computer when it came out?) This development is a major branch in the general scheme of electronics. Now, the user can actually program a calculating decision making electronic device for the first time. I agree with Ken in that the early machines were

destined to be replaced by equipment with more memory, disk drives and an improved operating system, graphics and user interface. All these features make programming your personal computer much easier and productive. My 8-bit is light-years ahead of an Exidy or IMSAI. But, is the ST?

If you follow the 2600 (MOED) branch of consumer products, you will find that this genre of products has been totally overlaid with personal computers of one sort or another. Dedicated word processors, graphics stations music systems - all sorts of MOED electronic products have been absorbed. But this is not personal computing. You are totally at the mercy of those who wrote the original program - No reasonable path exists for you to build on what they have done, or change the way they have done it. In fact, many of the higher powered MOED programs have been developed so that the user can configure it to his needs - even arrange the order of execution of the modules! A programmable MOED!! Funny, how the market seems to prefer such products...

Now, granted, You could change the programming of a 2600 if you really wanted to. You could re-do the circuitry inside your PONG, too. But, they are not programmable. Is the ST programmable? For a professional programmer, the ST must be fantastic. One of the reasons that less 8-bit software is available is the fact that all the commercial programmers that would write for the 8's ran out and got an ST. No question about the rationale behind that move, but can we draw the conclusion that the 8-bit is dead? These guys are not writing software for their own use. Would they all run to buy an ST if all they wrote was PD stuff for their friends? The question is: does the ST improve your ability to control your personal computer or do your own thing? Even at less cost, it makes no sense to 'move up' to a system with less utility. As an MOED - no question; if you have the application, use the ST MOED - it is the best system available. It will be surpassed in the near future by even better products, but it is on top of the heap now. As for programming the thing, I seem to draw a joker.

Back to my use of AtariWriter, I find that I can work with the raw data from it's files easily. The format is simple and well defined. The program itself has just about any feature that I am willing to use. As an example, I have

the THUNDER spelling checker for my ST. I could use it while I type PParl text to check my spelling. I don't. It isn't worth my time to learn how to use the thing just to do proofreading. The word 'roomer' in the first paragraph would probably go through without a hitch, which means I have to review the text myself, anyway. When I bought my ST, I looked for personal computing stuff - source code, sector editors, disassemblers and like that. I certainly had little interest in a copy of MoonMist. I can get that on my 8-bit (and if I can't, I can get something similar). I will certainly buy MOED products for my 8-bit, but I am not limited to them. AceCrack Pascal at \$150 is not my idea of a personal computer users language. I want Basic. So does everyone else that wants to use his computer for personal use. I also want to understand my hardware and how the operating system uses it. Like how to make the joystick inputs into outputs and how to turn the screen upside down (that may seem silly, but if the hardware exists to execute such a routine, I would like the documentation). The features in the 8-bits over the early personal computers made it much easier for the novice owner to use as a personal computer. The 'advances' incorporated into the ST make it a better MOED, but not a better personal computer. If I want a simple program to change the CompuServe line fee - carriage return into a CHR\$(155) character, I can write it myself. I can access the data. I can also download a program that someone else wrote to do the same thing. Look at the Disk Library program that is floating all over the country. I'll bet hundreds of people have modified the original to suit their own purposes. Most of the modifications are also available for me to make use of.

Sure, the ST may be a better 2600, but I don't think it will replace my 8-bit. I doubt that the 32-bit systems will be any better in that respect, either. Look at it this way, most of us would trade their 1951 Ford for a 1978 model, but how many of us would give up their car to buy an airplane?

* E N D *

TAKEN FROM THE SLCC JOURNAL

LAWS OF COMPUTERDOM

WEINBERG'S LAW

IF BUILDERS BUILT BUILDINGS THE WAY PROGRAMMERS WROTE PROGRAMS, THEN THE FIRST WOODPECKER THAT CAME ALONG WOULD DESTROY CIVILIZATION.

HARE'S LAW OF LARGE PROGRAMS

INSIDE EVERY LARGE PROGRAM IS A SMALL PROGRAM STRUGGLING TO GET OUT.

TROUTMAN'S PROGRAMMING LAWS

IF A TEST INSTALLATION FUNCTIONS PERFECTLY, ALL SUBSEQUENT SYSTEMS WILL MALFUNCTION.

NOT UNTIL A PROGRAM HAS BEEN IN PRODUCTION FOR AT LEAST SIX MONTHS WILL THE MOST HARMFUL ERROR THEN BE DISCOVERED.

JOB CONTROL CARDS THAT CANNOT BE ARRANGED IN IMPROPER ORDER WILL BE

INTERCHANGEABLE TAPES WON'T.

IF THE INPUT EDITOR HAS BEEN DESIGNED TO REJECT ALL BAD INPUT, AN INGENUOUS IDIOT WILL DISCOVER A METHOD TO GET BAD DATA PAST IT.

MACHINES WORK, PEOPLE SHOULD THINK.

GOLUB'S LAWS OF COMPUTERDOM

A CARELESSLY PLANNED PROJECT TAKES THREE TIMES LONGER TO COMPLETE THAN EXPECTED; A CAREFULLY PLANNED PROJECT WILL TAKE ONLY TWICE AS LONG.

THE EFFORT REQUIRED TO CORRECT THE ERROR INCREASES GEOMETRICALLY WITH TIME.

LAWS OF COMPUTER PROGRAMMING

ANY GIVEN PROGRAM, WHEN RUNNING, IS OBSOLETE.

IF A PROGRAM IS USELESS, IT WILL HAVE TO BE DOCUMENTED.

IF A PROGRAM IS USEFUL, IT WILL HAVE TO BE CHANGED.

ANY PROGRAM WILL EXPAND TO FILL ANY AVAILABLE MEMORY.

THE VALUE OF A PROGRAM IS PROPORTIONAL TO THE WEIGHT OF ITS OUTPUT.

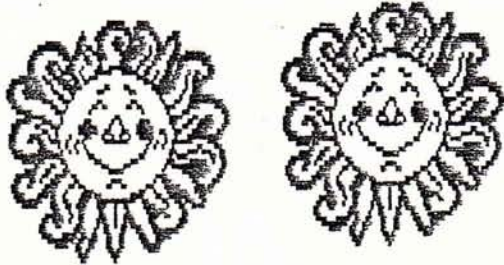
PROGRAM COMPLEXITY GROWS UNTIL IT EXCEEDS THE CAPABILITY OF THE PROGRAMMER TO MAINTAIN IT.

MAKE IT POSSIBLE FOR PROGRAMMERS TO WRITE IN ENGLISH AND YOU WILL FIND OUT THAT PROGRAMMERS CANNOT WRITE IN ENGLISH.

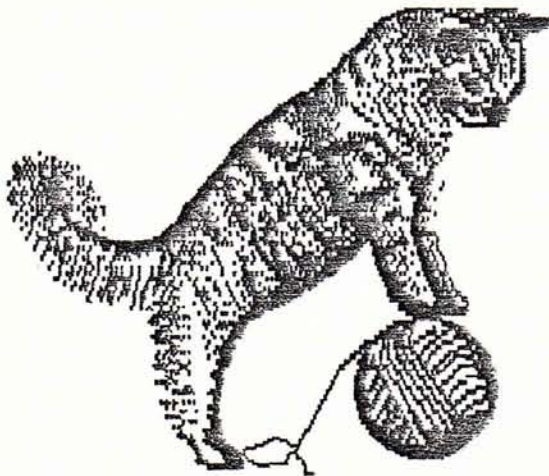
BRADLEY'S BROMIDE

IF COMPUTERS GET TOO POWERFUL, WE CAN ORGANIZE THEM INTO A COMMITTEE - THAT WILL DO THEM IN.

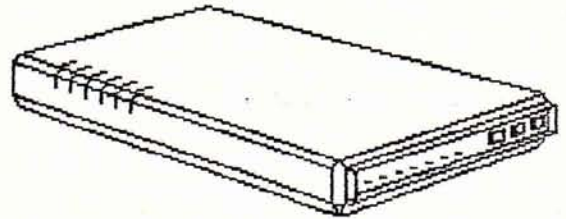
profitability they should be able to increase their manufacturing presence and start producing a more diversified line of products more in line with announced target dates.



So as the Sun sinks slowly in the west, we can only hope that it will sink somewhere close to Sunnyvale, California, lighting a fire under the leadership at Atari Corp. and getting some of these new products rolling!



AVETEX MODEM MODIFICATIONS from Cottonwood Computers



Cottonwood Computers has developed several modifications which can be done to your non-Hayes compatible modems. The first modification will add a hi-speed carrier detect to your Avatex 1200 to make it 100% Hayes compatible in this regard.

We also have devised a way to add a speaker mount to the Avatex so that you can hear dial tones and busy signals when dialing other computers. You must supply the speaker. We install a circuit which allows this and put in a speaker jack which you can plug into. We can also drill a small hole which allows you to modify the sound level with the use of a small screwdriver.

The prices for these modifications are as follows:

Hayes speed detect:
\$10.00

Speaker circuit/ jack:
\$20.00

Have both done for \$26.00!!
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